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After the 'Long March'

AT A RALLY THAT MARKED THE CONCLUSION OF RAHUL Gandhi's almost five-month-long foot march—Bharat Jodo Yatra (BJY)—covering about 3,570 km from Kanyakumari to Kashmir, several opposition parties joined the meeting to express their solidarity with the Congress Party's efforts to challenge the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). These parties, barring the communist parties, are actually members of the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA). The march was like a marathon as it traversed 12 states and two union territories. No doubt ordinary Kashmiris took some interest in BJY because of continuous fear-psychosis they are being forced to live in. At least for a moment they heaved a sigh of relief. No doubt lots of people walked with Gandhi during the last few days but lots more didn't. While unfurling the tricolour at Lal Chowk in Sri Nagar Rahul Gandhi said, "Statehood and Restoration of the democratic process in Jammu and Kashmir are very fundamental and important". But he remained non-committal on the contentious issue of Article 370 which was scrapped by the BJP-led government in August 2019. Initially the Congress Parliamentary Party opposed the abrogation of Article 370 but later backed out and played it safe in the face of hysteria created by the saffron brigade.

In truth many leaders of Rahul Gandhi's party thanked Mr Modi in silence for taking the 'courageous step' to abolish Article 370. It simply encouraged the Modis to come down heavily on Nehru's blunder! The Congress Working Committee at a meeting on August 6, 2019 criticised the Modi government on the manner in which Article 370 of the Constitution was abrogated and division of Jammu and Kashmir into union territories but shed away from demanding the restoration of Article 370. They opposed it on methodology, not in principle. In truth they were a passive passenger in Modi's train. The Congress joined the Gupkar alliance with the Abdullah family controlled National Conference, Mufti family managed People's Democratic Party and People's Conference for a short period and became a signatory to the joint statement issued in August 2020 that stated that the parties would strive for restoration of Article 370 and 35A. But in November 2020, Congress made a volte face and declared that it was not part of Gupkar alliance or People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration.

In a state without an elected government since 1918, many people in Kashmir, saw in the Congress initiated march a ray of hope for return to

parliamentary culture. The election-oriented parties of Kashmir, not excluding Gulam Nabi Azad's recently floated outfit are virtually jobless. The Congress is talking about statehood only. And the BJP has nothing to worry about so long as the grand old party maintains a calculated dilemma on Kashmir's special status.

Congress stalwarts said that the Yatra was not organised to forge political alliances; they went a bit philosophical in describing the purpose of the Yatra: 'Hate will lose, love will always win'. Congress doesn't differ much from BJP on the Kashmir question. Mere rhetoric cannot deliver the goods and satisfy the aspirations of people.

The Bharat Jodo Yatra may have motivated Congress cadres at the

grassroots level to some extent but this much organisational activity is unlikely to reverse the political hegemony of the saffron establishment. Nor will it make Rahul Gandhi a national figure for which party leaders; more precisely Gandhi loyalists took so much pain and trouble. Also, this Yatra cannot be a cementing factor in uniting the fractured opposition camp. All the opposition parties, including communist parties, have been talking about united opposition against BJP ever since the Modi party came to power in 2014, only to expose their utter disunity at the time of elections. As most regional parties are too opportunistic to project a viable alternative before the electorate saffronites are likely to make it easy in 2024

unless something dramatic, like farmers' movement, happens. No doubt secular ethos are facing continuing assault from BJP and its multiple frontal organisations. But the Congress brand of secularism is too naïve to enthuse the minority community people and the victims of engineered mob violence. The Congress Party cannot fight the BJP on economic grounds because the Modi enterprise backed by the corporate lobby is in reality implementing economic blueprint scripted by the Congress government. Talking vaguely about unemployment and accusing BJP of polarising people on communal lines without taking any positive and sustained agitational approach to counter it won't help them much in vote market. □□□

COMMENT

UT Without a Legislature

WITH NO LEGISLATURE, LAND and jobs even after three years of being a UT, many Ladakhis feel cheated and betrayed.

On 21 January, Ladakh's top environmentalist Sonam Wangchuk took social media by storm by claiming that "All is not well in Ladakh".

The engineer-turned-education reformer made a fervent appeal to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to intervene and "safeguard eco-fragile Ladakh".

Wangchuk concluded a five-day-long climate fast at 18,380 feet high Khardung La pass on February 1 to invite attention of the Union Government to address the demands of Ladakhis. But no response from the Centre.

However, on 27 January, Wangchuk was placed under house arrest at his institution in Leh by the administration, and was asked to sign the bond under Section 107 CRPC to ensure he wouldn't make

any statement or participate in public meetings for a month.

In Jammu and Kashmir, hundreds of political leaders and activists including three former chief ministers were put behind bars for several months when the Government of India revoked the special status of the region.

The government apprehended a strong mass upsurge in the valley because of abolition of Article 370; however, it had no inkling about the depth of resentment in the Ladakh region.

On 5 August 2019, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government abrogated Article 370 of the Indian Constitution that granted special status to the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir. The state was bifurcated into two UTs—Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh.

A separate UT was the long pending demand of the people of Leh and when the government finally granted it, they welcomed the

decision and celebrated the UT status. But the Kargil district showed a strong resentment against parting ways from Jammu and Kashmir.

However, over three years down the line, people of both regions feel betrayed by the BJP, as they were expecting the UT to have legislature and protection of land and Jobs.

The demand of UT for Ladakh was indeed, a long pending demand; however, they were in favour of a UT with legislature.

"Article 370 was protecting their land and other rights but it's no longer there now". They cannot get back what they have lost—special protection. Under the new arrangement they are going to lose their land. It is a matter of time that alienation of land will cause severe social unrest in the region. In truth the Ladakhis were better off with the special provisions under Article 370 which ensured that big business would not be able to exploit their resources. Earlier they had four MLAs in the State assembly of Jammu & Kashmir and now they have none. The Lieutenant Governor appointed by the Centre decides the fate

of Ladakhis and rules Ladakh with iron fists.

The issue has united both the leaders from the Buddhist majority Leh and Muslim majority Kargil such that they are on the same page and have decided to launch a “massive agitation” if their demands aren’t fulfilled.

The Sixth Schedule was enacted in 1949, as per Article 244 of the Indian constitution. It was designed to protect the indigenous and tribal groups by establishing and functioning autonomous district divisions known as the autonomous district councils or ADCs.

Because of the sixth schedule, the indigenous and tribal groups in the north-eastern states have significant autonomy.

The Sixth Schedule grants considerable autonomy to tribal communities. The District Council and the Regional Council get the real power to make laws.

However, on 3 December 2019, the Govt made it clear that Ladakh may not fall under the sixth Schedule of the Constitution.

“The main demand was UT with the legislature but this didn’t happen. Ladakh was a strong case for the 6th schedule because 90% population is tribal”.

The BJP promised the sixth schedule in the 2020 parliamentary elections and kept its manifesto but later backtracked and didn’t even talk about it. □□□

[Contributed]

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by
Farooque Chowdhury

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NOTE

The Enemy behind the Scene

Bharat Dogra writes:

WHEN THE TALIBAN regime in Afghanistan recently banned women from working in NGOs, several of them decided to stop working in this country, but later some of them reconsidered this decision and decided to continue working.

This decision should be supported because while the ban on women working in NGOs was clearly and completely wrong, the fact that over two thirds of the people of Afghanistan, including women desperate to feed their children, need humanitarian aid, cannot be ignored. Hence in these extremely difficult conditions, for these NGOs with established contacts and experience of delivering humanitarian aid, it would not be proper to abandon people, and their decision to continue working here is very sensible.

The Taliban regime’s decision to ban women from working in NGOs is completely wrong not just on

grounds of gender injustice and discrimination but in addition it will be extremely harmful for the country and its distressed people as women play such a valuable role in taking humanitarian aid further. Besides, many women will be deprived of the few good jobs that are still available to them.

While the entire world should condemn such arbitrary and cruel anti-women decisions of the Taliban, people should also ask another question—how did such forces of extreme religious fundamentalism become so powerful? The answer is well-known—to fight the Russian army and the communist regime in Afghanistan friendly to Russia, the USA and the CIA, with Pakistan’s help, financed and armed with most deadly weapons Islamic fundamentalist fighters who were summoned from all over the world to assemble in Afghanistan.

Under which Afghanistan regime

did the women of this country have the most freedom to join all kinds of jobs and access all kinds of education? Clearly it was the communist regime, whatever may have been the other problems with it (and there were many). If gender justice is the key concern of the USA and its western allies, then they should have welcomed the communist regime, but they spent huge money to arm religious fundamentalist militants from all over the world (including Bin Laden and his followers) to fight and oust this regime and hang its leader.

The story goes back much further. When the pro-people regime of Sukarno was being ousted in Indonesia in 1965-66 by General Suharto in a prolonged coup aided by the USA and its allies, the religious fundamentalist Islamists were called in as a close ally by Suharto and company, with the main job assigned to them of killing communists. Communists were a big force then under Sukarno and it was suspected by coup leaders that they will come to the help of Sukarno and will oppose the pro-imperialism and

pro-big business changes that were on the agenda of the coup leaders. Mobs of these armed fundamentalists and extremists went on a killing spree, identifying people on the basis of being communists, communist sympathisers, and less often on the basis of some racist background too. Nearly half a million to one million people were killed over of six months in Indonesia in 1965-66.

There are several other examples of the USA and its close allies using and supporting religious fundamentalist forces, which are generally known for their support for gender based discrimination and injustice, in order to oust and harm communists, socialist or other governments, parties or groups considered to be hostile to the USA and its allies. Hence the USA and its allies have to accept a

big part of the blame for making forces of gender discrimination and injustice more powerful in several countries. Such an acceptance should be the first part of a wider process for ensuring that such mistakes are not repeated in future. □□□

[The writer is Honorary Convener, Campaign to Save Earth Now. His recent books include A Day in 2071, Planet in Peril and Protecting Earth for Children.]

LEFTIST DILEMMA

War in Ukraine—Shades of the Past and Portents of Things to Come

Sumanta Banerjee

[This is in response to Farooque Chowdhury's article appeared in Frontier in its January 8-14, 2023 issue. While appreciating Farooque's critique of his piece 'Leftist Response to the War in Ukraine', originally published in Countercurrents.org (November 1, 2022), Sumanta Banerjee asked Farooque Chowdhury to go through his article—War in Ukraine—Shades of the Past and Portents of Things to Come, carried by the same portal-Countercurrents.org (November 18, 2022), as it provides answers to some of the questions raised by Farooque Chowdhury in his critique. We reproduce below the article referred by Sumanta Banerjee.]

LAATEST NEWS FROM THE battlefields of Ukraine indicate that the war game is moving in uncertain and unpredictable directions, and nothing is happening in terms of a final score—either by the Russians who have invaded Ukraine or the Ukrainians who are defending their territory. Russia's recent decision to withdraw its foot soldiers from Kherson could be a temporary manoeuvre of retreat, to protect them from the ever-increasing Ukrainian onslaught that was leading to mounting loss of these Russian lives. But a vindictive Putin, in revenge for his forced retreat from the ground, is resorting to the alternative tactics of going up to the aerial heights from where his air force bombs Ukrainian cities and villages. Ukraine's president Zelensky is retaliating by using the NATO-supplied missiles to target these Russian bombers.

As usually happens in such mili-

tary operations, there are always goof-ups—actions which go out of control of the warring contestants. One such instance is a recent missile strike on November 15 in a Polish region bordering Ukraine, which killed two people. Trying to put an end to the controversy about whether the source of the attack was Russia or Ukraine, US President Biden has now acknowledged that it could have been caused by a misguided Ukrainian air-defence missile—which ironically enough was supplied by his own government.

Searching the ground reality in Ukraine

In the midst of this ever-changing scenario and confusing military signals, one trend however seems to run as a common thread—the determined war of resistance led by Ukraine's president Volodymyr Zelensky. His war efforts are of course being heavily sustained by the US and NATO powers which are pump-

ing in state-of-the-art artillery and missiles, that have enabled him to prevent the Russian invaders from reaching the capital Kyiv, and to push them back.

But at the same time, one cannot dismiss his fight as a solely Western-aided war. There is ample evidence of the popular support that he enjoys—not only loyalty from his army, but also wide spread support from his people, who had elected him with an overwhelming majority of votes in 2019. That this support still continues is evident from reports and pictures that are coming forth from the ground level—interviews with both soldiers in the battle field, and common citizens living amidst the ruins of their homes destroyed by Russian air raids. All of them are united in the determination to fight to the end the Russian aggressors whom they can never forgive.

Disturbing signals from Zelensky's war against Russia

There are however certain disturbing aspects of this anti-Russian resistance led by Zelensky. One of his major allies is the ultra-nationalist neo-Nazi armed group called Azov Battalion, whose members have joined the war against Russia. There are allegations about their atrocities against Russian-speaking population of Ukraine, mainly concentrated in the four eastern regions of Kherson, Donetsk, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia. It is not surprising therefore that Russia could exploit these anti-

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Ukraine sentiments among the Russian-speaking people, and through a mock referendum annexed these four regions to the Russian orbit.

The other disturbing revelation relates to the award of this year's Nobel Peace Prize to the Center for Civil Liberties of Ukraine. A rival Ukrainian human rights group called the Ukrainian Pacifist Movement has accused the Center of supporting NATO and US donors—thus not worthy of a peace prize. (Re: Ariel Gold and Medea Benjamin: 'Who Deserves a Nobel Peace Prize in Ukraine?' in *Countercurrents*, 7/10/2022)

The war in Ukraine is increasingly becoming murky. The initial nationalist urge of the Ukrainians to preserve and protect their sovereignty and resist the Russian invaders, has been usurped and incorporated by the US in its global agenda of settling scores with an aggressive Putin. As a result, the Ukrainian local national resistance war is now being submerged by a larger proxy war between Russia and the US-led European alliance. The US is using Ukraine as a testing site to defeat a Putin-led Russia. The Ukrainian fighters trained and aided with armaments by the US, are pushing out the Russians and reclaiming territories. Putin has been forced to be on the defensive, and in a desperate effort to intimidate the Ukrainians, is bombing Kyiv and threatening a nuclear retaliation, on the plea that Zelensky is planning to use a 'dirty bomb' against Russia—an allegation made without any evidence.

Harking back to the past—fratricidal Warfare

To come down to brass tacks, the present war over Ukraine can be described as an outbreak of an internal conflict within the capitalist camp between two of its family members—the senior USA and its junior cousin Russia (both dyed-in-the-wool capitalist regimes, the lat-

ter of recent origins)—over territorial expansion.

There is a hoary tradition—both in mythology and history of religions—of such fratricidal warfare within members of the same family. Remember the war between the *Kauravas* and *Pandavas*, as described in the 'Mahabharata'? Or, how the two sons of Adam and Eve fought each other, ending with Cain killing his brother Abel, as narrated in the Holy Bible? Or take again the killing of the Prophet's grandson Husain in the massacre at Karbala, by rivals from among the Prophet's own followers, over the ownership of the caliphate—as found in the history of Islam.

Modern history of Fratricidal Wars and Treaties

Similarly, families of modern nations, who may be sharing common economic systems and following the same models of development, have often fallen out with each other—mainly over territorial disputes. The First World War was fought between two Western global camps which adhered to the same economic order of capitalism within their respective countries, but competed with each other in expanding their control over territories beyond their borders. The Second World War began with a similar conflict between the capitalist and imperialist German-Italian-Japanese axis on the one hand, and the West European capitalist powers on the other, over the issue of territorial expansion. It was only later that the socialist camp of the Soviet Union joined the Western capitalist alliance to fight the Nazi-fascist menace which had become a threat to both, which till then belonged to opposing ideological camps.

There was thus a new constellation of global powers, which after the end of the Second World War, led to a mutually agreed division of spheres of influence between the capitalist and socialist camps. Within

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the capitalist camp, the European powers swayed influence over the Western hemisphere, while the US took control over its backyard in South America. The socialist camp represented by the then Soviet Union was allowed to take over the states in its backyard in Eastern Europe (which its Red Army had liberated from Nazi occupation).

The period of the Cold War—punctuated by Battles

During the decades that followed this post-war agreement, both the super-powers, the USA and the Soviet Union engaged in a global contestation mainly by means of occasional outbursts in the diplomatic arena, and disruptions in commercial trade channels. This came to be described as Cold War.

Meanwhile, in their respective spheres of influence which were carved out by the post-war treaties, how did the US and the Soviet Union treat the people within those countries? The strategies and tactics that both followed regarding them, curiously enough looked like mirror images of each other—although both claimed that their ideologies and plans of development were mutually opposed. The US-led European capitalist countries described themselves as ‘Western democracies’, and denounced the Soviet Union and its allies in East Europe as ‘dictators’. Yet, the US installed local military autocrats (backed by its CIA) in the South American states, while the Soviet Union installed its local protégés (corrupt and power hungry politicians) in power in the states in its domains in the backyard in Eastern Europe. In the political parlance in those days, the US-backed regimes in South America were described as Washington’s ‘puppet states’, and the Soviet Union backed East European regions as Moscow’s ‘satellite states’.

Within a few years however—both

Washington’s ‘puppet states’ in South America and Moscow’s ‘satellite states’ in East Europe were facing rebellions from the local populace. In South America, Cubans under Fidel Castro sparked the fire, that was to spread all over that sub-continent against US domination in the 1960s. In Czechoslovakia in Soviet-dominated East Europe, the Czechs under their leader Alexander Dubcek launched the movement called ‘Prague Spring,’ promising to liberalize their society from the Soviet-style dictatorship. The Kremlin-led Warsaw Pact soldiers marched into Prague to crush the movement. Over the next two decades, popular discontent continued to simmer in East Europe, and finally it erupted in the 1980s in Poland in the form of the Solidarity Movement with roots in working class trade unions.

Fratricidal Warfare within the Socialist Camp

At the same time, the socialist camp was also being riddled with conflicts among its members—often leading to wars. As I read these news about the war in Ukraine, I am reminded of another similar war waged some four decades ago between two states, both swearing by the oath of socialism. In February 1979, Communist China’s PLA (Peoples Liberation Army) invaded its Communist neighbour Vietnam. It was China’s churlish attempt to punish Vietnam for its earlier invasion of Kampuchea in December 1978, that led to the toppling down of China’s protégé Pol Pot. This notorious dictator not only massacred his own people, but also conducted bloody cross border raids into Vietnam, torching villages and killing Vietnamese civilians. Yet, China continued to prop him up. China could not forgive Vietnam for ousting its protégé, and it retaliated with an attack on Vietnam. But after several months of warfare, the PLA was forced to withdraw in the face of stiff resistance

from the Vietnamese army. A battalion of PLA soldiers surrendered to the Vietnamese. A photograph of their meek submission is displayed in the War Museum in Hanoi. I remember, during a brief visit to Hanoi 1986, my Vietnamese friend took me to the museum and proudly showed me that picture. I could make out that he was asserting his nationalistic identity against a foreign invader—although both China and Vietnam at that time belonged to the same socialist camp.

As in Vietnam in 1979 where the people of a small state dared to repulse a superior global power, today also the Ukrainians of a small state are challenging the military might of a global power, and burst out in glee whenever a Russian tank is destroyed. As in the past again, while the Vietnamese resistance against China was militarily aided by the Soviet Union, today the Ukrainian offensive is being bolstered by arms supply by the US and Western powers. While the Sino-Vietnamese conflict ultimately became a proxy war between China and the Soviet Union, both swearing by the name of Communism at that time, similarly the conflict in Ukraine today is also fast assuming the shape of a proxy war between Russia and the US—both belonging to the same capitalist camp.

Significantly, both the wars share a common backdrop. As in the past, today also a realignment of global powers is taking place, that is determining the course of the war in Ukraine.

Parallels in the geo-political background of the two Wars

The Sino-Vietnamese war of 1979 was fought against the backdrop of changing relationship among the global powers. The schism in the international Communist movement between the People’s Republic of China and the Soviet Union, which began

in the early 1960s, exacerbated during the 1970s over border disputes between the two states. While mouth-ing Communist rhetoric for his do-mestic audience, Mao-dze-Tung drifted out from the Soviet-led social-ist camp, and had no qualms in striking an alliance with his one time enemy President Nixon of US, wel-coming him to Beijing on February 21, 1972. Yet, these were the days when Nixon's air force was bombing Vietnam and killing thousands of free-dom fighters and common citizens.

Over the next years the Sino-US bond grew apace with increasing mutual trade. These years were also marked by increasing distancing be-tween China and Russia, leading to hostilities. It spilled over to the proxy war in Vietnam—where the Soviet-aided Vietnamese nationalists man-aged to oust the Chinese soldiers from their soil. This was a fratricidal war of sorts waged by two members of what was till then described as the socialist camp. It was plagued by bitter internal dissensions. The last nail in the coffin of the Soviet-fash-ioned model of socialism was the dissolution of the Soviet Union itself in the early 1990s.

Over the next decades, Russia and China managed to overcome their differences, and moved closer to each other to be able to emerge as a rival camp in the global arena to challenge the US-led West. But their rivalry with the West was never based on any ideological differences, or alternative models of socio-econ-omic development. Both the camps followed the same capitalist . model of free market economy in their domestic spheres that allowed the emergence of billionaires, corrupt politicians and authoritarian rulers in their respective states. Thus we find mirror images of politicians like Trump, Putin, Xi, Modi among rul-ers in other states of the world—whether in the South, or even in the

West where Right-wing populist lead-ers are coming to power. In the global financial market, Indian bil-lionaires are rubbing shoulders with their counterparts from Russia and China. Ironically, both these coun-tries at one time were identified with the dream of socialism!

Today's Reconfiguration of global powers and their Allies

The present Russo-Ukrainian war is occurring in the context of another new reconfiguration of global pow-ers. The two traditional contending camps—one the US-led alliance of the West and oil-rich Arab states, the other led by the Sino-Russian alliance—are undergoing a process of disturbing changes in the interna-tional scene. They are discarding some of their old partners and ac-quiring new ones. For instance, cracks have appeared in the US-led camp after the latest decision of the Saudi Arabia-led oil-producing coun-tries of OPEC-plus (of which Russia is an important member) to cut down their oil production. This will further deprive the Western nations of their energy needs.

The US has therefore accused its old ally Saudi Arabia of siding with Russia. This signifies a crucial turn in the geo-political scenario. Is Saudi Arabia, which had traditionally been a loyal ally of the US, tilting to-wards Russia? Such a speculation is further strengthened by a recent re-port about a Saudi prince who has brokered a deal between Russia and Ukraine for swapping prisoners. (Re: 'Why Saudi Arabia rebuffed Biden's pleas for more oil?' *Times of India*, October 9, 2022).

Meanwhile, the Sino-Russian camp is seeking new allies. Russia's Putin has struck up an alliance with his Iranian counterpart, president Ebrahim Raisi, who under the bless-ings of the religious fundamentalist Supreme Leader of his country, Ali Khamnei, has been supplying mili-

tary drones to Russia. These drones are being used by Putin to target common citizens of Ukraine, de-stroying their lives and homes.

China's Role as a global Usurer

Similarly China, the other member of the Sino-Russian camp, while continuing to pump financial aid and diplomatic support for its all-weather ally Pakistan, is also enlarg-ing its camp of allies by wooing other states, extending its commer-cial influence and power in south and central Asia and Africa. But unlike Russia's blatant militarist in-terventions to extend power, as in Syria and Ukraine, China is resort-ing to a sophisticated economic means—through the crafty tactics of financial blackmailing of poor devel-oping states.

Beijing is luring these states into its fold by offering financial loans for developing infrastructural projects in their countries—loans which have to be paid back with interest to China after a fixed period. Under these inter-state treaties, these projects are usually allowed to be manned by Chinese contractors and fed by raw materials imported from China—since the host country may be lacking the expertise and the required resources. But the amount of payments for the Chinese experts and the imported materials that has to be borne by the host country, is deducted from the total amount of the Chinese loan that was given to the beneficiary state. Thus, the ac-tual amount of the Chinese loan gets reduced by these deductions.

Over and above this, when the debtor country fails to pay the re-quired amount, China bullies it into conceding economic or political privi-leges. This is how it obtained a 99 year lease over the proposed Hambantota International Port in Sri Lanka. Initially, the Exim Bank of China offered loans to Sri Lanka for building the port in 2007. But

for various reasons, the project began to lose money and Colombo could no longer suffer the continuing burden of debt-servicing China, that was exhausting its exchequer. As its last resort, it had to submit to China's demand for leasing out the port in exchange of the much needed readily offered cash.

Again in the same way, China has acquired control of the Port of Mombasa in Kenya. Earlier, it offered loans to Kenya to help it develop the port, with conditions of repayment. Kenya came close to default on Chinese loans in 2018, forcing it to relinquish its control over the port, and give it away to China. Through such financial black-mailing, China is usurping and occupying strategic maritime spots in the South Asian and African peninsula, thus extending its influence and power over these continents.

Further, Xi's China is also entering the markets of Central Asia's former Soviet republics like Turkmenistan, Kazhakistan, Kyrgistan, thus challenging the hitherto Russia control over them. This is creating friction with Putin's Russia—

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thus fracturing the Sino-Soviet camp.

Flawed perception of the global conflict as between monolithic Democracies and Dictatorships

This global conflict between the two camps—the US-led West and the Sino-Russian axis—is often simplified as a war between democracy and dictatorship in popular perception. Thanks to the media propaganda, people tend to identify the former with democracy and the latter with dictatorship. But to come down to brass tracks, the US, the so-called champion of democracy, has had a long record of destroying democratic regimes and propping up dictatorships in its backyard in South America. Even beyond, it employed its CIA to stage a coup in distant Iran in 1953, whereby it ousted the democratically elected prime minister Mosaddegh to replace him with its puppet, the monarch Shah Pahlavi. It had no qualms in aligning with the despotic regime of Saudi Arabia which suppressed the democratic rights of its citizens. It went the whole hog in bolstering up a religious fanatic group, the Taliban, with military aid in order to overthrow a government in Afghanistan that was supported by its rival, the then Soviet Union.

The US thus claims to be a global power, supposedly entrusted with the responsibility of establishing 'democratic' regimes in other countries—a la the nineteenth century British colonial claim of the White Man's burden to 'civilize' the colonized people. It follows an aggressive foreign policy of intervention in other countries, described as 'regime changing' in the name of establishing democracy. It has designed a model of twin strategy for such intervention. At times, it can be through direct invasion (as in Iraq), at other times through an indirect route. This latter route has been followed by exploiting anti-incumbency senti-

ments in Left-ruled states in South America, by manipulating public demonstrations against their rulers—usually through its paid agents among the native population of these countries, in order to overthrow these regimes and replace them with Washington's puppets.

Washington and Kremlin—Fighting Twins

Ironically, it is this model of US foreign policy, with all its aggressiveness and intrigues and manipulations, that has been exactly adopted by Putin's Russia in its operations in Ukraine during the last several years, topped by its annexation of Crimea, which is followed by its present mode of conducting the war in Ukraine. The US and Russia, facing each other in Ukraine, can discover themselves as twins born of the same womb.

The dispute between the Sino-Russian-Iran-Saudi Arabian axis and the US-Western axis with its partners in other parts of the world, who are equally authoritarian and dictatorial as the Sino-Russian allies, is a conflict between two camps of ambitious global powers.

Emerging Fault lines

But as indicated above, neither of these two camps is monolithic. Cracks are already appearing in both the camps following the economic consequences of the continuing war in Ukraine. Some of the Western allies have expressed their reservations about the punitive sanctions imposed on Russia, as a result of which they are blocked from the cheap Russian energy supplies via pipeline. As for the other camp—the Sino-Russian axis and its supporters, the alliance appears to be rather shaky. As Russia increasingly faces reverses on the warfront in Ukraine, even its closest ally Chinese President Xi is becoming less vociferous in his support to Putin. His other bear-hugging friend in India, Narendra Modi, has also distanced

himself from him by advising him to quit the 'era of war', and opt for peaceful dialogue. This mood was evident at the latest G-20 summit of the global powers in Indonesia, where the majority condemned the war in Ukraine and urged for immediate dialogue to end it.

Way out from a Static Confrontation?

But how can a peaceful end be brought to the war in Ukraine? It remains frozen within a cage—where two contending global camps are fighting with each other, at the expense of the common citizens of Ukraine. But sparks from within that cage are spreading out and the world economy is catching fire from them. How do we break open the doors of that cage, and release its inhabitants?

There are signs of attempts at peace negotiations—with both Putin and Zelensky at times sending signals for such talks. In his latest message, Zelensky has laid down conditions for such talks—that Russia must relinquish the occupied areas of Ukraine, recompense the victims of its bombing attacks and punish its soldiers for the atrocities that it had committed. Russia has totally

rejected these conditions.

Can there be a half-way house compromise—that will provide Putin with a face-saving device for retreating from Ukraine, and at the same time satisfy Zelensky with meeting some of his demands? Can it be based on an agreement by both sides, Ukraine temporarily accepting the present status quo of the Russian annexed four Ukrainian regions, and Russia promising to hold a plebiscite soon in those regions under UN supervision to ascertain whether their citizens choose to remain in Ukraine or join Russia? In the meantime, both the sides can agree to a ceasefire, each holding on to its respective zones of occupation.

While the European allies of the US which are economically suffering from the war can put pressure on Washington to persuade Zelensky to come to the table of negotiation, Beijing (also aware of the long term effects of the war that would adversely affect its ambitious trade and commercial interests in the global economy) can persuade Putin to sit at the table. A compromise could be worked on the above mentioned suggestions.

As Timir Basu is still seriously ill, he is not in a position to communicate with contributors and subscribers. Please bear with us.

—Fr.

But even if this compromise may put an immediate end to the war, it will face other hurdles in the aftermath. Questions will be raised at international fora about the atrocities committed by Russian soldiers in Ukraine—condemned by the UN and other international human rights bodies. Shouldn't Putin be hauled up before the International Court for War Crimes—as his predecessors, the rulers of Congo and Serbia? □□□

[In the midst of writing this article, I received Farooque Choudhury's 'Response...' (to an earlier article of mine—Leftist Response to Ukraine War) carried by Countercurrents on 4/11/22. I also received a response from Saral Sarkar (through Countercurrents again) who is my old school class friend from the Calcutta days of 1947-48, who is now settled in Germany. I am trying to respond to their queries—may be in a befuddled way—relating to the issues emerging from the background of the Ukraine war.—Sumanta Banerjee]

A TRIBUTE

Paresh Chattopadhyay (1927–2023): Singleness of Purpose

Bernard D'Mello

THE EMINENT MARXIAN socialist scholar and critic of Lenin's Marxism, Paresh Chattopadhyay (PC) passed away on January 14, 2023, in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. He was emeritus professor of political economy in the department of sociology at the University of Quebec, Montreal. With a mastery of Marx in the original and an admirable presentation of Marx's thought, PC made his readers think and reflect over what he wrote.

As a young scholar and a State Doctorate in Economic Sciences (1964), University of Paris, a major influence was the French Marxian economist and historian, Charles Bettelheim (1913–2006), with whom PC had a close association over a long period. Undoubtedly, PC was influenced and inspired by Bettelheim's magnum opus, *Class Struggles in the USSR, First Period: 1917-1923* (1974), *Class Struggles in the USSR, Second Period: 1923-1930*

(1977), *Class Struggles in the USSR, Third Period: 1930-1941, Part One: The Dominated* (1994), and *Class Struggles in the USSR, Third Period: 1930-1941, Part Two: The Dominators* (1996), especially the first two volumes. But, with a critical, independent bent of mind, he disagreed with Bettelheim's observations made in a 1985 mimeograph in French that Marxian concepts were insufficient in analysing the Soviet economy because of the "new forms of capitalist relations" in Soviet type societies. PC closely followed the Bettelheim–Sweezy (the latter, Paul M. Sweezy, 1910–2004) debate in the pages of the independent Marxist socialist magazine, *Monthly Review*.

By the 1980s, looking at Soviet history in the light of what Marx understood as socialism, and using Marxian categories to comprehend what had gone wrong, became PC's singleness of purpose as a Marxian socialist scholar. Based largely on a stream of his published research papers between 1981 and 1993, PC published his first major work analysing the Soviet economy within a Marxian theoretical framework, using Marx's method and categories – *The Marxian Concept of Capital and the Soviet Experience: Essay in the Critique of Political Economy* (1994).

In this book, capital as social total capital was conceived as a social relation of production and as the private property of a class, with the enlarged reproduction of the exploited wage labourers separated from the conditions of production. The accumulation of capital was the independent variable and the employment of labour the dependent variable. The Soviet economy, under the control of the “completely autonomized Party-State,” was spurred by the desperate attempt to catch up and surpass the advanced capitalist economies, mainly by quantitative expansion of production, lacking as it was in its capacity to revolutionise the methods of production. But such a mode of accumulation of capital reached its limit of absolute overaccumulation of capital, i.e., not being able to match the productivity increases in Western capitalism, leading to a fall in the rate of profit and difficulty in increasing the total surplus value/total profit, which formed the basis of the regime's collapse. Like Bettelheim, PC characterises the Soviet economy as state capitalist, but comes to this conclusion with the help of Marx's method of critique of political economy and capitalism, and Marx's theoretical categories.

PC confronts both the idea that

the Soviet economy was socialist, and alternatively, that the post-revolutionary society was neither capitalist nor socialist. The main proponent of this thesis was Paul Sweezy. PC's refutation of Sweezy's thesis didn't quite convince me, but over here, I will leave the matter with a set of four questions: Doesn't the logic of capitalist accumulation unfold from the mutual interaction of competing units of capital, on the one hand, and the class struggle between capitalists and workers, on the other, with the capitalists acting to maximise their profits and use them to expand their capitals? Doesn't a capitalist state react to the unfolding of the laws of value and capital accumulation? Wasn't it the case that in the post-revolutionary societies, the utilisation of the surplus product was not governed by the laws of value and capitalist capital accumulation, but instead became the central focus of the political process and political struggles? Wasn't it a fact that, unlike capitalism, these societies did not have an autonomous economic foundation? [These questions arise from a close reading of Paul M. Sweezy's *Post-Revolutionary Society* (1980)].

As to Marxian socialism, conceived originally by Marx as “a society of free and associated producers without state, commodity production, and wage labour” (PC), Soviet society completely lacked that human emancipatory character. The Party-State exercised its dictatorship over the proletariat, the producers having been transformed into wage labourers. For PC, the wage-labour relationship is deemed to be necessary and sufficient for the existence of capital and capitalism.

With his singleness of purpose, a series of three books followed – *Marx's Associated Mode of Production: A Critique of Marxism* (2016), *Socialism and Commodity Produc-*

tion: Essay in Marx Revival (2018), and *Socialism in Marx's Capital: Towards a De-alienated World* (2021). After all, as PC himself put it in 2016: “Marx's liberating idea of a noble and humane society as the real alternative to the nightmare that capitalism has led to is more relevant than ever before.” Marx's Associated Mode of Production is, again, about how Marx envisaged the process of human emancipation as freedom, but tragically, the way in which those who considered themselves his disciples read and interpreted his texts as their guide to action stood Marx on his head.

For Marx and Engels, proletarian revolution was meant to be the work of the “immense majority in the interest of the immense majority,” wherein the proletariat, leading itself, was to first gain political power, then “expropriate the expropriators” by degrees, and assume the position of the ruling class, followed uninterrupted by the “revolutionary transformation period.” Only at the end of this period, with the “disappearance of the capitalist class and with it the proletariat and the class rule altogether,” the revolution reaches its goal, inaugurating the Association of Free and Equal Individuals, this, a society “with no private ownership in the means of production and communication, no wage/salary system, no commodity-money relation and no state.”

But, PC argued, Marx's disciples turned this libertarian conception of socialism into a Party-State affair – rule by a Communist party, not controlled by workers, with the means of production owned by the state, but “retaining the wage/salary system and commodity production.” PC argues that despite Lenin's “original libertarian position,” close to Marx and Engels, in his *State and Revolution*, Lenin interpreted Marx wrongly on a few counts. Lenin mixed up social-

ism (calling it the first stage of communist society) with the period of revolutionary transformation when there is the need for a “dictatorship of the proletariat.” In Lenin’s understanding, as interpreted by PC, in a socialist society, there will be a state with controlled, disciplined, wage/salaried employees. PC calls this the “anti-Marx position of Lenin”.

The book, however, includes chapters on Marx’s 1844 Parisian manuscripts with its central theme of alienation and beyond alienation, Marx’s original exploration of political economy in 1844–1847; a Marxian portrait of post-capitalist society; the dialectic of labour in the critique of political economy; how Marx looked at women’s labour under capitalism (here PC also takes on feminists convinced of Marx’s “patriarchal bias”); Marx on the “global reach of capital” (“capital’s globalising tendency as its central characteristic”); crisis theory in Marx’s 1860s economic manuscripts; “market socialism” as a theoretical configuration; whether capitalist development is “a necessary precondition for the passage to the new society”; and Marx’s 1875 critical “marginal notes,” showing that Marx’s socialism was not even tried in “twentieth-century socialism.” PC uses the first fruits of the latest version of the MEGA (the Marx/Engels Gesamtausgabe) project, dedicated to publishing the complete manuscripts of Marx and Engels, which, he writes, is “free from any partisan political-ideological control. “Overall, the book shows that Marx’s (and Engels’s) ideas had been deliberately misinterpreted by those who “came to power under the banner of Marx, calling themselves communists,” this to “justify their own pursuit of political power.”

In *Socialism and Commodity Production: Essay in Marx Revival* (PC 2018), PC also takes on the

anti-Stalin left, including “some of the most knowledgeable and open-minded Western scholars, such as (E. H.) Carr, (Issac) Deutscher, and (Paul) Sweezy, (who) came to believe that Lenin rather than Marx was right in holding that proletarian revolution could occur first, not in advanced countries, but in countries which were comparatively backward. “But, of course, the Party-State figures yet again. Marx posited that political parties, whose origins he traced to class antagonisms, would disappear with the transition to a classless society. And, the state, he considered as “an apparatus of coercion and repression,” which would have no reason to exist in a socialist society. And, bureaucracy, which he traced to the separation of state and civil society, he discerned as “a particular self-contained society within the state.” This whole superstructure of capitalist society is to be destroyed in the process of the proletariat gaining power.

In the new society, according to Marx, “there will no longer be government or state power distinct from society itself.” PC stresses Marx’s anti-state position. The dictatorship of the proletariat in the political transition period, which will represent “the immense majority in the interest of the immense majority,” must be “the least repressive form of state.” Following the second Five Year Plan (1933–37), the rulers of the Soviet Union proclaimed the victory of socialism at the end of the period of proletarian dictatorship, but what was singularly absent was “the emancipation of the working classes” as understood in Marx’s sense. Readers of the book, *Socialism and Commodity Production*, however, will benefit from PC’s elegant exposition of commodity production; commodity production and socialism in Marx’s followers; socialist accounting; anarchist collectiv-

ism; guild socialism; market socialism; and the “problematic” of the non-capitalist road to socialism.

PC’s last book, *Socialism in Marx’s Capital: Towards a De-alienated World* (2021), makes a case for going beyond Marx’s critique of the Gotha Programme, by bringing in Capital and related work regarding political economy—the 1857–58 manuscripts, the Grundrisse, the 1959 Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, and the 1881 last manuscript for volume two of Capital—into the discussion of socialism in Marx’s works. In Capital as a critique of the “bourgeois science” of political economy and of capitalism, Marx considered capitalism as a transitional society, which by its own organism, from its internal contradictions, generates the advent of socialism envisioned as an association of free and equal individuals.

PC reminds his readers that in his Afterword to the second German edition of Capital, Volume I, Marx wrote: “In so far as this critique represents a class it can only represent that class whose historical mission/profession [Beruf] is to revolutionise the capitalist mode of production and, finally to abolish classes.” For capital, in Marx’s understanding, as PC reminds readers, is a specific social relation of production represented in stock, means of production, accumulated labour, and so on, at a particular phase of human history.

The chapters on “Socialism and Emancipation” and “The New Society: Towards a De-alienated World,” whether one agrees with PC’s arguments/interpretations or not, are masterpieces in Marxian exposition. For instance, in PC explaining what Marx meant by “free individuals” in a “free society” in his conception of socialism—“individuals who are neither personally dependent as in different forms of slavery and serfdom,

system[s] of caste and race servitude, and patriarchy, [and] not materially dependent as in capitalism,” this in a free society where there is “collective ownership of the means of production, and with no classes, no state and no pillars of oppression, exploitation, and alienation.” Or again, in PC’s exposition of Marx’s discerning of three broad stages in the evolution of the human society—one, wherein there is “subjective or personal dependence, “two, wherein there is “personal independence but objective or material dependence, “and three, in socialism as conceived by Marx, where there would be “free individuality with neither personal nor objective dependence. “The “appropriation of the ‘means of labour’ by the collective body of the freely associated individuals,” Marx expected, would take humanity towards a ‘reunion,’ which, once established, would complete the long transition from the society of “alienated, fragmented individuals” to one of de-alienated, “freely associated individuals.”

This writer, however, thinks that PC should have also stressed on the

open-endedness of Marx’s materialist conception of history. Shouldn’t Marx’s principal hypotheses be carefully re-examined in the light of subsequent evidence, as a few Marxists have admirably done? Isn’t there a need to reconstruct and extend his critique of capital and capitalism, and political economy, in the light of subsequent developments, as a few Marxists have commendably done?

How then should I put the work of the Marxian socialist scholar, Paresch Chattopadhyay, over the last thirty years, the period following the failure of Marxism in the short twentieth century to achieve the goals set by Marx and Engels—the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of a socialist democracy—in perspective?

With the near dissolution of the intellectual and political environments in which Marxist intellectuals and Marxian scholars had been rooted, people have all been through challenging times. The wave of anti-Marxism; the seclusion, the solitude, and the isolation; fellow Marxian scholars/Marxist activists losing the force of their convictions, abandoning their Marxian/Marxist ways, and even (some) embracing post-modernism. And an ongoing “Marxist” disparaging of Marxian scholars critical of Lenin’s Marxism as anti-Marxist. Worse still, little evidence worldwide of proletarian internationalism; and even worse, a lot of evidence of workers, weighed down by bourgeois propaganda, under the sway of semi-fascist nationalism and other degrading passions.

That Paresch da, amid all of this, stuck to his singleness of purpose – admirably presenting Marx’s thought based on a close reading of Marx’s original works, in German, French, and English; looking at Soviet history in the light of what Marx understood as socialism; and using Marxian categories to comprehend what

had gone wrong. [But, over the last three years, PC suffered from COVID, double pneumonia, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, etc. But he didn’t give up the struggle, though over last year as his physical condition got worse, he began to lose his grip over many things. The odds of survival began to thin, even as his Jamaican caregivers lovingly looked after him till the very end. Here I am paraphrasing Rana Bose who cared for Pareschda like family.]

PC’s four books, mentioned above (PC 1994; 2016; 2018; and 2021), read with an open mind, can provide useful insights and lessons to Marxist activists worldwide in the struggle for socialism. Perhaps if he had avoided political invective, he could have reached a wider readership of Marxists. In Kolkata, besides the tiny Calcutta Marx Circle, and particularly Sankar Ray, PC’s works do not seem to have had much influence. How one wishes that Marxists adopt a spirit of cooperation in their debates, like Bettelheim and Sweezy did in the pages of *Monthly Review*, for then, such debates could lead to a synthesis of the views of the participants on the central issues.

At the time PC’s great work, *The Marxian Concept of Capital and the Soviet Experience* (1994) came out, so did the Hungarian Marxist philosopher István Mészáros’ (1930–2017) magnum opus, *Beyond Capital: Towards a Theory of Transition* (1995), with, among other things, a deep analysis of the failures of “real socialism.” And Mészáros too followed this up with books that went over this theme, for instance, in *The Challenge and Burden of Historical Time* (2008). For Mészáros, the Soviet Union was not capitalist, not even state capitalist, but the Soviet system was dominated by the power of capital (which had picked up the threads without capitalism) and the

গড্ডালিকা প্রবাহ থেকে

বাংলা ভাষা তথা মাতৃভাষা বাঁচান

‘শুধু পূর্বাশা’

সাড়া জাগানো বাংলা পাক্ষিক পত্রিকা

ও ‘পূর্বাশা এখন’ মাসিক পত্রিকা

এখনই সংগ্রহ করুন

সব স্টলে পাওয়া যাচ্ছে। ‘শুধু পূর্বাশা’ দাম ৫

টাকা মাত্র ও ‘পূর্বাশা এখন’ ২৫ টাকা মাত্র।

‘শুধু পূর্বাশা’-এর বার্ষিক গ্রাহক চাঁদা ১৭০

টাকা। ‘পূর্বাশা এখন’-এর গ্রাহকরা অতিরিক্ত

১০০ টাকায় পাক্ষিকটিরও গ্রাহক হতে পারেন।

কলকাতা কার্যালয় :

২৩, ডাঃ কার্তিক বসু স্ট্রিট, কলকাতা-৭০০০০৯

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“capital system.” Going beyond capital means “going beyond capital as such and not merely beyond capitalism,” for the transformation to socialism involves not only eradicating capitalism, but, with it, the social organic “capital system,” and implanting another, a socialist organic system, capable of taking deep roots alongside the withering away of the state. How one wished for a debate between PC and Mészáros, in a spirit of cooperation, with the possibility of a synthesis on the central issue, but this was not to be.

In truth PC’s political invective and, at times, gratuitous anti-Lenin polemics, put off a number of Marxist intellectuals. Albeit the opposite was also the case—Marxian scholarly work critical of Lenin was dubbed anti-Marxism. For one thing PC should have kept in mind that Lenin is respected and admired by Marxists because, in 1914, he and Rosa Luxemburg denounced the Second International’s betrayal of international working-class solidarity. Moreover, the two were basically on the same page as revolutionaries—they both believed that revolutionary consciousness could be built mainly through revolutionary actions, and that revolutionaries should closely follow the trend of important developments so that they don’t have to be dragged along upon being found napping. The differences between Luxemburg and Lenin on communist organisational questions stemmed from the fact that Germany after the repeal of the anti-socialist laws was bourgeois democratic, whereas Russia was bourgeois autocratic.

PC’s critique of Lenin’s Marxism doesn’t appreciate the fact that in the period, 1917–23, Lenin was trying to preserve a long-term socialist perspective even as the weight of circumstances and conditions on the ground were obliging him to take the

revolution towards realising realistic objectives. After all, didn’t the long-term trend of the capitalist “development of underdevelopment” on a world scale (continuing in the present), force revolutionaries in semi-peripheral/peripheral countries like Russia, China, Cuba, etc., who could not remain unmoved at their people’s plight, to take their people along in embarking on a long road to socialism, beginning on the basis of poverty? It is unfair to dismiss this as “Don Quixotism,” as PC does. Many of the industrial workers were half worker, half peasant, but Lenin and his comrades did all they could to raise the consciousness of the toiling classes for overthrowing capitalism.

And, it must be remembered, in a revolution, the lines across the proverbial barricade ultimately coalesce into two sharply polarised ones—in matters of life-and-death, “those who are not with us are against us.” Unfortunately, the “liberal”—socialist parties ended up in the counter-revolutionary camp. They did not seem to have learned any lessons from the fact that the Kadet Party had supported Kornilov’s aborted coup in August 1917.

This writer, however, broadly agrees with PC’s main thesis. In the Marxian conception of revolution, the revolutionary period came to be divided into three sub-periods, capitalism in the process of being overthrown, the transitional period—the time span of the transition to a classless society—during which there would be the need for a “dictatorship of the proletariat,” and the initial period of socialism. There was an awareness that even after the first sub-period, the counterrevolution, invariably backed by imperialism, would have to be combatted and vanquished, lacking which, there would be a likelihood of failure, defeat, or betrayal.

However, in every case, after the

first sub-period of the revolution, a tightly organised revolutionary party under non-proletarian elite leadership had come to power, expropriated the bourgeoisie and the landowners, and more or less centralised all the instruments of production in the hands of the state. That state was, however, not that of the proletariat (and the semi-proletarian poor peasantry) organised as the ruling class. The societies in the second sub-period of the revolution, therefore, could not be properly called, in the original Marxist meaning of the phrase, societies in transition to socialism. And, needless to say, the state was never in a process of withering away, made worse by the never-ending imperialist threat. The initial period of socialism never came. An autocratic elite—in command of the vanguard party, the technocracy, and the state bureaucracy—metamorphosed into a ruling class and, with the passage of time (in Russia, after 74 years), in a great leap backward, even restored capitalism. In the main, Professor Paresh Chattopadhyay is right (although this writer does not agree with his state capitalist thesis and his assessment of Lenin).

Paresh Chattopadhyay had a singleness of purpose. He made it his mission, as a Marxian socialist scholar and intellectual, to contribute to an understanding and clarification of what Marx and Engels, as revolutionaries, considered necessary for the world’s proletariat to liberate itself and all the world’s oppressed, exploited, and dominated—the overthrow of capital and capitalism along with the state institutions capitalism had brought into being. And, for this project, Paresh Chattopadhyay underlined what should not be done, and what should never have been done.

□□□

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EROSION IN REAL INCOMES

ILO Wage Report

Atanu Chakravarty

INTERNATIONAL LABOUR Organisation (ILO) has published its latest report: **'Global Wage Report—2022-23, The impact of Inflation and COVID-19 on wages and purchasing power'**. The 148- page report has vividly narrated the impact on wages and purchasing power across countries and regions. The most startling revelation in this report is, for the **FIRST TIME IN THIS CENTURY**, Global real wage growth has entered into the negative territory, while real productivity has continued to touch new heights! The global monthly wages fell in real terms to 0.9 per cent in the first half of 2022. If China, where wage growth is higher than in most other countries is excluded, the report mentions, the fall in real wages during the same period is estimated at 1.4 percent! The report continues", 2022 shows the largest gap recorded since 1999 between real productivity growth and real wage growth in high-income countries".

Among the G-20 countries, which account for some 60 percent of the world's wage employees, real wages in the first half of 2022 are estimated to have declined to 2.2 percent in advanced economies, while wage growth in emerging economies slowed but remained positive at 0.8 per cent. This stark reality is a pointer that nominal wages have not been adjusted sufficiently in the first half of 2022 to offset the rise in the cost of living. The fact of the matter is this erosion of real wages affects **ALL WAGE EARNERS** across the board. Greater impact fell upon the low-income people who spend a higher proportion of their disposable incomes on essential goods and services, the prices of which are increasing faster than of non-essential items in most countries.

The report has categorically men-

tioned the key factor behind the decline in the total wage bill, particularly during 2020 and the first quarter of 2021 was loss in employment. The groups that suffered most were low-wage earners, informal workers and women wage earners in particular. Furthermore, during the cruelest months of pandemic, the report finds, total wage bill declined most at the lower end and the households that were forced to go into debt for survival, now face the double whammy of repaying their debts at higher interest rates while facing sharp dip in incomes.

Between 2008 and 2022, real wage growth among all G-20 countries was highest in China, where real monthly wages in 2022 were equivalent to about 2.6 times their real value in 2008.

In all previous Global Wage Reports, ILO pointed out, average wage growth has lagged behind average labour productivity growth since early 1980's in several large developed economies. ILO has noted, in 52 high-income countries, real wage growth has been lower than productivity growth since 2000. In 2022, the gap between productivity growth and wage growth reached its widest point since the start of twenty-first century, with productivity growth 12.6 percentage points above wage growth.

Inflation has eaten up the real wages accompanied by significant wage losses incurred by workers and their family members during the pandemic. Coupled with job losses, shorten hours worked and adjustments in hourly wages during the crisis resulted in an accumulation of lost earnings for wage employees and their families in many countries. Wage employees in informal sector were worst affected in comparison to the employees in formal employ-

ment. ILO report also found employment losses (including jobs and hours worked) from 2020 to 2022 were greater among women, particularly during 2022.

Recently, the World Economic Forum ranked India at 134 out of 146 countries in its Global Gender Gap (GGG) Index for 2022. It is the worst performer in the world in the "health and survival" sub index where it is ranked 146. India also ranks poorly among its neighbours and is behind Bangladesh (71), Nepal (96), Sri Lanka (110), Maldives (117) and Bhutan (126). Only Iran (143), Pakistan (145), and Afghanistan (146) perform worse than India in South Asia.

With great concern, ILO commented that the deterioration of workers' real incomes will go on unabated and lead to a fall in aggregate demand, which in turn would increase the probability of deeper recession, endanger economic and employment recovery, further increasing inequalities and giving rise to social unrest.

To stem this rot, ILO has suggested that minimum wages must be adjusted regularly to take into account the needs of workers and their families, along with economic factors. Strong social dialogue, including collective bargaining, which the present Central Government in India has put in the back-burner, can be instrumental in achieving wage adjustments during a crisis, ILO emphasised.

Neo-liberal economy has exposed its real face. The global supply chain is under deep stress, and severe recession is looming large with more and more lay-offs, wage squeeze and curtailment of union rights.

Working people have to fight back for decent wage. They are fighting in Britain, France, Greece and elsewhere. Workers even in advanced countries are increasingly taking to streets and resorting to strikes to protest against decline in real wage and price rise of essential commodities.

Up to half a million teachers, university staff, train drivers and civil servants in the UK went on a strike in the largest co-ordinated action for years amid high inflation and disputes over pay.

What is happening in France deserves serious attention. The international media may say hardly a word, but that does not mean that these days France is not being shaken by the biggest social eruption of the

last several decades! On January 31, the demonstrations against Macron's notorious pension reform were the most massive in the century for 30 years (a total of 2.5 million protesters according to the unions) bigger even than those of the historic, victorious and enduring mobilisation of 1995 which accelerated the fall of Chirac! Today France looks like a volcano about to erupt. The persons in authority are more

interested in promoting arms business against the backdrop of Ukraine-Russia war while keeping the police force on high alert all the time to tackle the demonstrators demanding better pay and social security. Workers' movement in France means a lot to European wage earners in general. After all France has been for some centuries the permanent social and revolutionary "barometer" of the whole of Europe. □□□

LETTERS

Oxfam Report

India's top 1% owned more than 40.5% of its total wealth in 2021, according to a new report by Oxfam.

In 2022, the number of billionaires in the country increased to 166 from 102 in 2020, the report said.

Meanwhile, it added that the poor in India "are unable to afford even basic necessities to survive".

The charity called on India's finance minister to levy a wealth tax on the ultra rich to tackle this "obscene" inequality.

The report - Survival of The Richest - was released as the World Economic Forum began in Davos, Switzerland.

The report highlighted the large disparity in wealth distribution in India, saying that more than 40% of the wealth created in the country from 2012 to 2021 had gone to just 1% of the population while only 3% had trickled down to the bottom 50%.

In 2022, the wealth of India's richest man Gautam Adani increased by 46%, while the combined wealth of India's 100 richest had touched \$660 bn.

In 2022, Mr Adani was ranked the second richest person in the world on the Bloomberg's wealth index. He also topped the list of people whose wealth witnessed the maximum rise globally during the year.

Meanwhile, the country's poor and middle class were taxed more than the rich, Oxfam said.

Approximately 64% of the total goods and services tax (GST) in the country came from the bottom 50%

of the population, while only 4% came from the top 10%, the report said.

"India is unfortunately on a fast track to becoming a country only for the rich," Oxfam India CEO Amitabh Behar said. "The country's marginalised - Dalits, Adivasis, Muslims, women and informal sector workers are continuing to suffer in a system which ensures the survival of the richest."

The rich, currently, benefited from reduced corporate taxes, tax exemptions and other incentives, the report added.

Meryl Sebastian, Kochi
Paresh Chattopadhyay

The stories of excesses in Soviet Russia had always created fissures within international communist movement. In the post world war period it remained no longer hidden that all was not well in Stalin's Russia. Communist movement suffered from a vertical split due to the schism, pro-Stalinism-anti-Stalinism. In addition to Gulag stories China added its own woes created by Korean War, famines, Cultural Revolution. The whole world of communist movement crumbled down when in August 1991 hardliners organised an impotent anti-people coup d'etat in Moscow.

In the intellectual world the baby was thrown out along with the bathwater. The criticism of Stalin and Mao went so far that Marx himself was held suspect in the genocides under the leaders.

Dr Paresh Chattopadhyay was one

of the very few who brought back communists' interest in Marx in the post- 90s.

The Leninists (in fact Kautsky, Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, Mao all) and the anti-communists in tow, in their petty bourgeois understanding of Marx see the philosophical, political, economic and social categories as truncated, independent moments, dichotomised from others.

As a result any defence or criticism of Leninism in Russia or China saw political and economic issues as separate problems, as if the Bolshevik model was right, only some unintended consequences led to the excesses and subsequent failure.

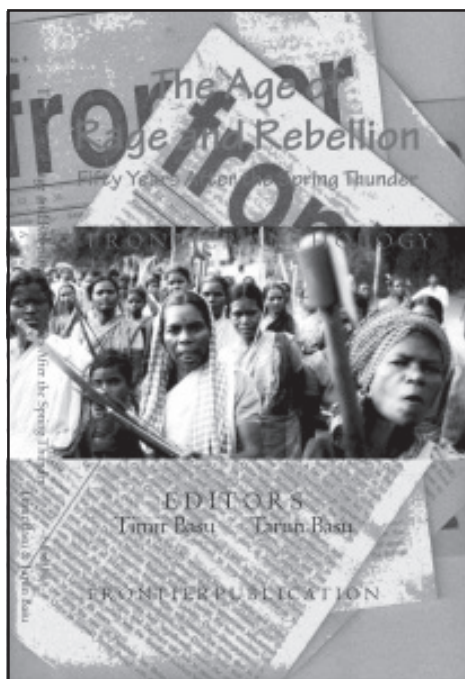
Dr Paresh Chattopadhyay, in the spirit of Marx, saw the categories as interdependent and found the failures of Soviet model within the philosophical conception of Leninist socialism which is a huge deviation from Marx's idea of 'Association of free and equal individuals'. The Leninist departure from Marx started early in their understanding of Capital and Commodity Production, Socialism and workers' struggle to break free from the chains of wage slavery. Marxists took the words from Marx and made them stand on their heads instead of grasping the revolutionary meaning Marx added into them.

Dr Paresh Chattopadhyay is no more, but his lasting contribution to the revolutionary ideas will guide communist revolutionaries for a long time to understand Marx, to understand the failures of Russian and Chinese experiments and Leninism in general.

Arka Sen, Kolkata

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